

SOUTH GATE

(Castillo De San Cristobal, South Gate)
San Juan National Historic Site
Boulevard Norzagary
San Juan
San Juan County
Puerto Rico

HABS No. PR-57

HABS
PR
7-SAJU,
48-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington D.C., 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Location: San Juan, Puerto Rico, at the south west corner of Castillo de San Cristobal.

Present Owner: U. S. Government

Present Use: This gate provides access to a battery at the south west corner of Castillo de San Cristobal and to the cisterns beneath the courtyard.

Brief Statement of Significance: This structure, although modified from its original form, probably dates from the 18th century. Posts, decorated coping, fragments of early stucco finish, and an arched openings with a decorative surround remain.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: Probably 1779-1783¹
2. Architect & Builder: Either Thomas O'Daly or Juan Francisco Mestre, the engineers who were in charge of construction during this period.
3. Original plans, construction, etc.: None
4. Notes on alterations and additions: Details of the original Gate are unknown. The first concrete reference² about the Gate is the scale model of San Cristobal showing conditions as of 1835. There is no information as to how accurate the scale model is. At this date, the present Annex Building of the Officer's Quarters had not been built. The space occupied by the Annex Building formed part of the south end of the main patio of San

Cristobal. This space, on the city side, was protected by a wall of undetermined height, extending from the southwest corner of the Officers' Quarters, and joining the Gate on the south. The Gate is a continuation of the wall, with a door opening in the center. This same wall appears in the plan of 1783. The wall shown in the model is of considerable height, but physical examination behind the Annex Building shows the outline of this wall, but it is of a short height.

In a plan of San Cristobal of 1861,³ the Gate itself is shown exactly as that of the present time. There are no other records showing minor alterations or repairs on this Gate.

5. References:

1. Plan of San Cristobal and its outworks, September 13, 1783 by Eng. Juan Francisco Mestre..See floor plan of section where present Gate is built. There are indefinite signs of what appears to be a gate.
2. Found at San Cristobal Museum Room.
3. Fachada y Cortes del Castillo de San Cristobal, 1861, by Manuel F. Castro.

Prepared by: Ricardo Torres-Reyes
Historian, San Juan NHS
August 1963

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: This structure, although extensively modified by subsequent construction retains most of its original characteristics. Of special interest are fragments of early stucco finish, decorative copings, and an ornate surround of an arched opening.
2. Condition: Fair. The structure has been modified by subsequent construction, the original opening between posts closed by masonry, with a small opening, wood frame, and wood board door.
3. The structure, "L" shape in plan, including the arched opening and its surround, occupies an area 12'-0 X 15'-0".

B. Detailed Description:

1. General Description: This structure consists of two stone posts, one attached to the battered wall of the Troops' Quarters, the other at the parapet wall projecting out parallel to the west wall of the annex to the Officers' Quarters. A decorative coping connects the top surface of the parapet wall with the north face of the post. A decorative surround for a round arched opening (closed) projects above the parapet wall and is partly engaged by the southwest corner of the annex to the Officers' Quarters. Fragments of glass bottles are embedded in coping of wall between posts.

2. Gate posts: The gate posts are dressed stone; ashlar masonry, flush joints, approximately 1/4", lime mortar with pieces of brick or tile embedded. Fragments of the original stucco have scribed lines simulated 7/8" joints. Scribed joints coincide with actual joints. The east post is five sided, its jamb reveal is splayed to the north side of the gate. A crack in the stucco, north elevation, locates northwest corner of this post. A molded coping stucco over brick tops the short wall between the battered wall of the Troops' Quarters and the gate post has a molded cornice, a sloping coping, and a flat top (brick) surface. The west gate post is an unequal rectangle in plan. The intersection between the gate post and the parapet wall extending from the Officer's Quarters Annex is softened by a raised console or bracket wall in a circular-molding profile. The cap of each post is rectangular in plan, of stone and stucco over brick; stone and/or stucco ovolo and cavetto moldings, and stucco over brick finial.
3. Wall between gate posts: This wall is not original. It is topped with a masonry coping, double slope, with

broken bottle glass inserted. The opening in this wall has a flat round arch, the east jamb and soffit are splayed to the north elevation. The east jamb follows the original jamb of the east gate post. A wood frame (modern) is in the opening. A threshold-like projection occurs at the south elevation of this wall. The north elevation of the structure is stucco, south elevation partly stucco.

4. Door: Wood board door. (Modern of no importance).
5. Surround of arched opening (closed): A portion of the parapet wall extending from the Officers' Quarters Annex is raised to form a surround for an arched opening (closed with rubble masonry). Both sides of this surround are bracketted and consist of circular and scroll-like moldings. The north portion of the surround is partly engaged with the southwest corner of the Officers' Quarters Annex. The bracket profile does not match the bracket wall at the west gate post. The arch of the opening (closed) is round.

C. Site:

This structure is located at the southwest corner of Castillo de San Cristobal, between the walls of the Officers' Quarters Annex and Troop Quarters. It is between the courtyard of San Cristobal and a ramp down to a battery.